

EFFECTIVE POLICE / COMMUNITY RELATIONS ARE THE CORNERSTONE OF THE PREVENTION AND DETECTION OF CRIME

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The title of this essay certainly invites us first to understand mainly what is really meant by effective police, and community relations and how these together can work in harmony to achieve the best results in the prevention and detection of crime in today's society. There are certainly various ways how police effectiveness can be measured and one of them is by comparing the actual achievements of a force with the results it was seeking to achieve. In very simple terms, police effectiveness is a comparison between the results that the Chief Constable (Police Commissioner) hoped to achieve during the year and the results that were actually achieved by his officers. Therefore one can deduce a definition of effective police as the progress of the police which has been achieved towards a given objective. Now if the results are good then there is no point of trying to discuss this essay, however it is today quite true in many police departments that the results of the measurement of police effectiveness are invariably not particularly satisfactory.

On the other hand to have ideal community relations, the police department has first to understand its management and its surrounding society with all its intrigues and changes. Community relations involve both the relations of the police with the community at large and relations of the police between themselves as the latter are also part of the same community. At this stage it is desirable to evaluate why today's society is having more crime rather than say in 1950's after the last world war. Although many criminologists tried hard to understand this phenomena, yet the most convincing reason is mainly the price of freedom and democracy in today's society. The more the rights to individuals and groups, the greater is the crime rate. Moreover the police department is associated with the authority and power to implement law and order, and research showed that citizens are generally intimidated by laws and hence by the police. So what should be done? First "popularizing the law" that is to bring the law closer to the people. This would lead to develop awareness of the various human rights guarantees, provide citizens with basic knowledge to use the law for the protection and implementation of human rights, acquaint them with the fundamental procedure of the judicial and administrative system and develop a sense of active involvement and national development efforts.

The public today must know that the methods of combatting crime are to be agreed upon jointly with the police. This is only possible if the public is aware of its rights through the laws and conventions. The idea of educating the public at all levels has also been stressed in article 26 of the Universal declaration of Human Rights (1948), "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms". Respect for human rights makes the community more aware in its voluntary right against crime, for crime in itself is a clear breach of human rights, besides being also a breach of a particular law of the laws of the land. This leaves no room that the police should be excused from not being fully aware of human rights. Infact one of the recommendations (3.3) in the final draft report of the International Congress on Human Rights, Teaching, Information and Documentation held in Malta between the 31st August and 5th of September 1987, "recommends to the Director – General to promote the training on Human Rights, such as magistrates, medical doctors, nurses, police officers, journalists, members of the armed forces, personnel of refuges camps, frontier police etc. by the intermediary of their national and interantional organisations and to promote human rights with senior executive of the mass media".

Another important point in making the public understand police work and inviting same to cooperate, in by informing regularly with our reported crimes and subsequent results. Historically 'the apostle of police-public relations' ¹ in this respect is John Fielding, the son of Henry Fielding, the famous author of the books *Tom Jones* (1749) and *Amelia* (1751). John like his father had great faith in the press as an agent to counter crime and he did everything in his power to publicize the proceedings of his court. He encouraged victims of crime to come to him. He published information sheets, showing how thieves attacked property. His contribution to police developrent was immense. He confirmed the value of detective branch, demonstrated the value of patrolling, exploited the crime preventive capacity of the press, and never lost sight of the social context of crime. Now if this proved right more then three hundred years ago, how even true it is today to improve even further our use of the mass media in a more convincing way than what Fielding managed at that very early stage to do himself. Very often the police blame television and the media, generally, for adding in their sea of troubles and occasionally this may be so, but it has to be remembered that in one sense the media are neutral and are available to all. The Police therefore have to develop the ability to use the media for their own legitimate use.

Another consideration is the confidentiality of the community in the police. We cannot expect the public to trust the police when the latter is employing corrupt officers. Any smell of corruption must be fully investigated by an independent body and the findings of the inquiry is to be made public. The public must always be assured, and has a right to be kept informed. For example in Houston, USA, controversy arose during the year 1989 over the action of Houston police officers. On July 28, 1989, James Cebula, a former officer, was convicted of kidnapping and raping a woman while on duty in 1988. Cebula

personal file contained sixteen prior complaints from citizens. An investigation by the 'Houston Post' found at least 28 other active duty police officers who also had a high number of citizen complaints in their files. A number of similar incidents occurred in 1989. On October 31st 1989, for example, three off-duty police officers, driving an unmarked car followed a woman they said 'cut them off' in traffic. When the woman fired a gun at the car, the officers fired back. During the gunfire, the woman was killed and an officer was wounded. Again also in USA, Houston, on November 15, 1989, a police officer killed a security guard during an apparent routine traffic stop. In November and December 1989, three other officers were arrested on drug charges. In an other inquiry that took four years to conclude in Philadelphia, USA, it resulted that in the Philadelphia police Department ², extortion and bribery charges included twenty six officers, ranging from patrol officers to a deputy commissioner. These examples are ample proof that corruption in the police departments harm enormously the existent relations between the police and community. Thus the integrity of the police department must be kept at all costs.

The morality degree of society is also an important indication in trying to find a balance between police work and the requirements of that society. We know that certain crimes that are committed in our society, attract less condemnation by society itself and hence the police in this respect cannot receive a good response from the public to detect same. Other crimes since they are committed by people who appear to be "decent", often attracts less uproar than other crimes committed by "unpleasant" people. Thus the morality of the society plays an important part in both the prevention and detection of particular crimes. This change was notably remarked at the time of the Wolfenden Report 1957 which said, "it is not, in our view, the function of the criminal law to intervene in the public lives of citizens". It was of course referring specifically to interfering with private sexual morality of individuals, and it went on to say in relation to police action in detecting homosexual and similar acts in private. It seems reasonable, however to expect that excesses of permissiveness will gradually be checked by public opinion and that the law and those who enforce it will achieve a reasonable balance in the enforcement of morally based laws. Although most crimes are *per se* immoral and all societies look at them in that way, yet this balance of morality versus law and order should be maintained as finally it is always the public that has to answer back. This question of morality has even been since Plato ³. From Plato's time it has been clear to all thinking men that laws are not necessarily just, and from the time of the Romans, that all that is thought to be normal need not necessarily be embodied in law. Keeping this important consideration in mind, one cannot ignore morality in discussing effective police and community relations, and so this situation leaves no choice but for the law and the police to move with great care and understanding and the police should not enforce laws in a roughshod fashion, merely because they exist. The Police have to learn to respect moral diversity and the pressure of moral freedom; nor should it be overlooked that all sin is crime. It is precisely in multi cultural societies, where there is particular disagreements on moral issues that the police should mostly strive

to reach an understanding of the relationship between law and morality and should understand that the enforcement of the law in a plural society which demands its moral choices is a very difficult activity requiring considerable skill. Thus if this understanding is present then society will respond to fight the obvious "immoral" crime. Then this will be the ideal atmosphere for preventing and detecting crime. Certainly such understanding depends on particular areas where the degree of morality varies. For example in a red light area, the presence of prostitutes is more tolerable than in another quieter area. This however does not always mean that certain crime should be left unnoticed. On the other hand once the crime is not reported then the tollerability of crime in a particular area increases.

Evidently materialism of today's society will reflect crime. The community will come closer to the police only if crime is present. The greater the crime rate, one would expect closer relations. Yet because it is man's appetite for materialism and for the acquisition of goods that society of his creation has organic characteristics of a criminogenic nature. The decriminalization of much private moral behaviour such as homosexuality, abortion, use of absene literature and so on, all in keeping with the growth of individual freedom, has liberated people from legal criminal guilt. Thus once no collective effort is made by all communities within a given society to decrease the quest for materialism, there could not result decrease in crime. This idea of decreasing the quest of materialism is an impossible mission, just as it is no point of eradicating crime, this too would be such another impossible mission. As recently as in 1977, after a lifetime in criminology, the world renowned Director of Cambridge Institute of Criminology, while considering the rise in crime, was unable to conclude on a note other than that, "for the time being, we shall have to live with it, and try to contain it" ⁴

So with all these factors present in our complex society we have to continue to understand the change that continuously takes place in our society, in order to prevent and detect crime. In order to know the effectiveness of the police in relation to crime, a measurement should be carried out in every police corp to:-

- (a) identify those crimes which the police, as a matter of policy do not actively seek to prevent and
- (b) identify those crimes to be prevented by police action.

Such an exercise would show where the public have confidence. Thus where the public have confidence that reporting a crime to the police will have a positive result, for example the recovery of their property, they are more likely to make a report than in cases where they believe there is little action or no action the police can take. Thus, almost 100 per cent of the incidents of theft of cars are reported to the police, whereas probably less than 50 per cent of thefts from cars are reported.

The police investigations of the reported crime and their subsequent detection have to be examined to see how actually the offenders are detected.

The examination will establish the contribution made by the citizens who identify and name the offender, the number of detections achieved through the admissions made by persons arrested for another offence, and the contribution made by other sub-divisions or police forces who arrest offenders who admit offences in the area under consideration. It is also important to establish the contribution made by various sections of the force. "For example, the quality of the initial police response to the call from the public to the scene of a crime is a very important factor in determining whether or not the offence will be subsequently detected"⁵. Only after such an examination, one could tell whether there is a strong increase of prevention and detection of crime through closer relations with the community or not. By doing these exercises, then the police corp could re-organise itself to plan and evaluate better. In the past the emphasis has been on conducting business as usual, with changes to policing methods occurring almost spontaneously to individual problems. This approach will not be adequate in the future because the success of this method as a means of improving police performance is extremely suspect.

Thus as rightly commented by the former Secretary of State for the Home Department in UK, the Hon. Douglas Hurd that "effective action against crime requires the police and all sections of the community to work together in partnership. In the inner cities where crime problems are most acute, there is an urgent need to involve local statutory services, local firms, voluntary organizations and concerned individuals in concerted and well targeted preventive action"⁶, it is of considerable importance for police to develop studies of victim / offender relationships since policies for allocation of resources and investigative procedures may be more accurately resolved from a better understanding of such phenomena. It is well known that the majority of murders are committed not by strangers but by members of the same family or circle of friends and acquaintances. Consequently all sections of this society have to be convinced that they all have a share in police work. For example if we take stores, the police may be called to advise their owners to put prominent notices warning shoppers that detectives are in action. The deterrent value of store detectives may bear little relation to the numbers on duty, but can certainly be enhanced by such notices. Again in a survey reported in a Home Office publication⁷, regarding crime in Hospitals, it has been noted that the physical design features of the hospital that is its building and grounds may also contribute to be preventive measure to combat the crime (for example the location of the car parks). On the other hand the police, too, need to be aware of the increased risk of victimisation at certain hours in particular areas, so that they can consider arranging patrols to coincide with these periods. Certain important questions have also to be asked by the police to the public when investigating particular crimes like theft say of merchandise, so that the answers would lead us to the detection of the crime. Not infrequently those carrying out thefts (particularly if) they are in a position of authority or intend to continue the practice will attempt to conceal the loss in order to avoid inevitable enquiries when their branch or department of the business is next audited. Identifying the means by which they do this (for example by claiming particular items on

a delivery never arrived) can prove to be an invaluable means of detecting the offenders.

The suggestions that are fruitful in preventing crimes most come out from the same public (community) after continuous dialogue with the police. The latter are always in better position to give the right advice. Unfortunately this is not always the case. In a survey carried out by Paul Ekblon and Francis Simon's book, 'Crime and racial harassment in Asian-run shops' in UK, the majority of shop keepers (81 %) said they had not received advice on crime prevention from anyone. Those who had had, nearly all been advised by the police; other advisers such as insurers, security companies, or fellow shop keepers were rarely mentioned. This is not satisfactory when in addition to the national police training system in UK, the Home Office also provides a crime prevention center for the training of crime prevention officers. Moreover the importance of getting closer to the community at all levels, was stressed as far as Willink Commission which examined among other things the Police / Public relations. For example in 1970, in UK, a race relations officer was appointed in Leeds. One can have a community constable if there are a lot of vandalism, high crimes, groups, anti-police feelings, in a particular area. The importance of keeping closely in touch through communication, which has been stressed earlier in this essay, could only be achieved through direct contact with the people and complemented with the assistance of the press and the media. Certainly the media is run by the community itself for the community and thus is of a major and subtle influence on police opinion. It needs to influence people and cultivate opinion. The mass media on the other hand needs the police for its bread and butter. So cooperation can only prosper if there is true goodwill on both sides and both have an insight and understanding of the other. It is now obvious that the prevention and detection of crime needs certainly more professionalism than just hue and cry to catch the offender in the old times. The introduction of neighbourhood watches even on experimental basis, is certainly a step in the right direction. In Malta for example this idea has just started and its results will have to be analysed within the next few years. In UK, recently there was the introduction of other challenging project like the safer Cities Programme. This is operating through the local projects and there are already sixteen projects till this year in operation. Four more will be introduced next year (1991). The idea behind these programmes, is that local cooperation and local initiative are discovering new ways of preventing crime and making communities safer. "Local people are the decision makers, enablers, and implementors in each case. The Home Office rule is to support them"⁸. This programme deserves follow up in other densely populated cities, in other countries where crime is high. Its objectives behind these initiatives are clearly to reduce crimes, lessen the fear of crime, and create safer cities where economic enterprise and community life can flourish.

Police and society must come in terms in the financing of their fight against crime. The commercial and business world undoubtedly suffers much from

crime against property. It may insure against losses through crime but the higher the losses the higher the insurance premiums until the point is reached where the cost of insurance against crime is too high. Therefore if prevention is introduced crime drops, insurance premiums are reduced and when the cost of prevention is accounted for, the balance of crime costs is reduced. Such a consideration clearly exerts new pressures on policing policies and the day may come when a socio-economic cost-effective approach to law enforcement will need to be carried out by police. The options available would be put to the public for their consideration. They would be faced with a list of options. How much of the limited budget for example, should be spent on prevention of crime and how much on its detection? Therefore society itself should be in my opinion the main chooser between the two approaches against crime. The detection approach is more costly while the preventive approach present always preferable results. Therefore while both approaches have to be applied to a certain degree, and while the detection approach is sound, indispensable and essential for society's survival, it is also true that too heavy a reliance on it, to the neglect of prevention, leave society less well served than it otherwise may be. The pursuit of preventive policies will help to create a more cooperative community through a heightening of its own potential for crime control. Prevention through the organisation of the community against crime to reduce fear of crime, the greater is the success of preventive policies in organizing communities against crime and the greater is the contribution on enforcement goals. A successful strategy will very greatly depend on the successful fusion of both the preventive and detection approach.

There is need (and there will be a greater one) for community involvement in social action to head off delinquency; and this should become a keystone of local strategy. Communities should then be educated in the importance of social concern for crime reduction. The police might be expected to offer leadership, advice, and information, but the independence of police in their constitutional and legal functions should of course remain unimpaired. On the other hand the police should constantly search for a philosophical base on their actions and since their primary function is not the suppression of crime and disorder after it has taken place, but the prevention of crime by action before it takes place, this is largely a social concept. It is true that the new management philosophy of the force must accept the need to examine new methods of policing. The present illness of our society is the very product of society's past mistakes. In fact as has been remarked in the *Ecologist*¹ that, "there is every reason to believe that the social live at present afflicting our society – increasing crime, delinquency, vandalism, alcoholism as well as drug addiction – are closely related and are the symptoms of the breakdown of our cultural pattern, which in turn is an aspect of the disintegration of our society",. Yet both the police and its community in any area of the world have still the duty to work together to produce a better society. A Maltese minister of Education & Interior Dr. Ugo Mifsud Bonnici LLD rightly remarked in an interview he gave to a Maltese⁹ that "the drug problem (in Malta) is not only a problem of the police but is also a cultural problem". Thus the need to have a partnership of understanding all our cultures and sub-cultures in the surrounding society,

is today an asset in the prevention and detection of crime. I would like to conclude with the following dialogue taken from the children's book "Alice in Wonderland"¹⁰ which I have also case across in other texts:-

Alice said to the cat, "Would you tell me please which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to go" said the cat

"I don't much care where" said Alice.

"Then it doesn't much matter which way you go" said the cat.

Unlike Alice who travelled alone, the police have the community as its companion and hence a responsibility of not ending in the Wonderland.

1. 'A House in Bow Street' by Anthony Babington, p. 86.

2 World Book year Book 1986, p. 455.

3 Law & Morality by Clem-Cooper and Brewry.

4 Sir Lean Radzinowitz and Joan King 'The Growth of Crime' Chapter 9.

5 Police Management by A J I Butler (Cower) 1984, p. 35.

6 Home Office publication "Safer Cities Progress report" 1988 / 89.

Home Office's "Crime in Hospitals Diagnosis and Prevention" by Lorna J. Smith.

8 The Ecologist (Penguin 1972) Chr. 1.

9 Maltese Weekly "Il-Helsien" of the 24.9.90 p. 1 and

¹⁰ Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll.

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